(i) The merger would result in a larger size of the balance sheet and broader capital base which would enable ICICI taking up higher exposures in projects;

(ii) It would also result in a stronger position for ICICI to access resources at competitive rates by leveraging the enhanced capital base;

(iii) Consolidation of operations and better manpower utilisation would result in lower operating costs, and would enhance shareholders value.

Patkai Coal Range

4422. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA : Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state :

(a) the estimated coal reserve in the Patkai ranges of the North-East and its contribution in the total coal reserve of the country;

(b) the quality of the coal so far as sulphur and heat contents are concerned as compared to the other coalfields;

(c) the total depth of the coal reserve and the percentage of its extractable by opencast mining in the Patkai range; and

(d) the quantity of coal being extracted in Patkai range by underground mining and opencast mining at present ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRIMATI KANTI SINGH) : (a) and (b) The estimated coal reserves in the Patkai range of North East are 0.4 billion tonnes. These reserves constituting 0.2% of the country's total coal reserves of 204.66 billion tonnes as on 1.1.1997 contain sulphur content ranging from 1.3% to 9.8% and Calorific Value 4680-8500 K. Cal/Kg.

(c) As per exploration done till date in Patkai range, the depth of occurrence of the coal reserves in Patkai range is generally 300 metres except in the case of Makum coalfield where the reserves are known to occur upto a depth of 600 metres. Due to steep inclination of coal seams and hilly terrain, the percentage of coal extractable by opencast mining of total Patkai range reserves is around 6%.

(d) During the year 1995-96, underground production in Makum and Dilli-Jeypore coalfields of Patkai range has been of the order of 3,00,155 tonnes. The opencast production in Makum coalfield during the period has been of the order of 5,21,418 tonnes.

Private Coal Companies

4423. SHRI RAM NAIK : Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government are aware that coal fields were nationalised on account of the collous flouting of basic safety and environmental standard by private companies;

(b) if so, the steps proposed to be taken to ensure that in future private companies may not resort to above practices;

(c) whether the Government are also aware that the major impediment in the transport of coal from the mines is inadequate and insufficient services of the Railways;

(d) if so, the steps taken by the Government to remove the above impediments; and

(e) the steps taken by the Government to immune the private companies from land acquisition related litigation ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRIMATI KANTI SINGH) : (a) Yes, Sir. This indeed was one of the factors.

(b) The Government have, subject to legislative changes, decided to offer new coal blocks to Indian companies, both in the public and private sector on the basis of competitive bidding. Such companies in the private sector will also be bound to follow the same safety and environmental regulations as applicable to the nationalised coal companies at present.

(c) and (d) It is a fact that due to the mis-match between production and transport capacities in some of the coal producing areas, the nationalised coal companies do face difficulties to move all the coal produced. Ministry of Coal and coal companies are, however taking steps to improve despatches by rail in coordination with the Railways. Steps are also constantly taken to upgrade and improve the infrastructure for evacuation of coal produced by the coal companies.

(e) The land acquisition by the private coal companies will be done under the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act of the State Governments as per the powers provided to them by Entry 18 of the State List of the Constitution.